

THE GOSPEL

INTRO: The Lord Jesus, speaking of the last days says that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived. The Scriptures abound with warnings. It was Paul who penned these words, "...knowing this that in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1).

The passage to which I want to draw our attention this morning is found in Galatians 1. Paul says in verse 6, "I marvel that you are turned so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different Gospel." Paul says it is a different gospel. There are two words for that word translated 'different' in the original language of the NT. There is 'another' of the same kind. That is *allos*. Then there is another of a different kind. That is *heteros*. There is only one true Gospel. There is no other of the same kind and there is no other of a different kind that is still a true Gospel. But there is another of a different kind that is a false Gospel.

So Paul says in verse 7, "...which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ." Now it is verses 8-9 that we want to zero in on this morning (read).

And so I want begin by raising a question this morning: If the devil were going to twist the Gospel into something acceptable to Christians, do you suppose he would come with something far off in left field, or do you suppose he would come with something very close to the truth, something that just makes a lot of sense? I don't have to grade that question because you know the answer. But I raise that question because some of you might say, "This preacher is nit picky. Come on, give us something we can recognize easier."

I originally intended to give one message that would include two false Gospels and the true Gospel. I will give three messages, one on each of those three. The first is the social gospel; then the saleable gospel; and last the saving gospel. I trust you will not listen to only one of the first two. It is the third that is most crucial. I questioned whether I should give them in the reverse order. But finally settled on giving them in this order.

I. THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

A. Definition of the social Gospel

What is meant by the social Gospel? In the June 30 edition of Time Magazine of 2003, they did an article called, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?" It is an interesting issue of Time to say the least. One section of this edition deals with an MCC worker in Iraq by name of Edward Millar. The article says, "Miller is a devout Mennonite; he was raised in various locations in Africa where his parents did the committee's humanitarian work. While he was growing up in his church's 'peace and justice' tradition, he says, 'there was always discussion about the injustice and inequities around the world and what we should do about it.'"

That statement about sums up the social gospel. It is an effort to bring about peace and justice in the world. Earlier in another article Time writes, "In the past century, as mainline Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. adopted a social gospel that stressed aiding the poor over preaching to the unenlightened, evangelization at its purest fell to the Evangelicals."

Nevertheless, aiding the poor and bringing about justice in the world is a lofty goal indeed, but the question is, "How biblical is it?" Well, according to the social gospel, it is quite biblical, so let us go to the most used text for this gospel.

B. The Text of the Social Gospel

I think it can be fairly said that the most used text for the social Gospel is Matthew 25:34-36 (read). Now let me quote from the same article from Time Magazine. By the way this shorter article is called, "Keeping the Faith Without Preaching It." I quote, "Whereas Evangelicals often trace their missionary activity to the Great Commission ('Therefore go and make disciples of all nations', Matthew 28), more liberal Christians prefer a verse from Matthew 25; 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was sick and you took care of me.' That reference shows up on the

Mennonite Central Committee's website along with a commitment to 'sharing...faith in Jesus Christ.'"

So I invite you to turn to Matthew 25:34-36. We want to spend some time to examine this text. Now I want us to notice first that this is an eschatological text. That means it has to do with prophecy and end times. In verse 31 it says, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory." Now I must make at least a brief explanation of the three major end time views. These views go by the names of postmillennialism; amillennialism and premillennialism.

Let me begin with the postmillennialism because we can remove this view very quickly from the roster. Postmillennialism is a view that says we will get Christians into positions of government, leadership of all kinds, etc... and we will then make the world better and better until we bring about an indeterminable time of peace. At the end of this time Jesus Christ will come. That is a view we can discard immediately. The facts are that the world is not getting better and better; it is getting badder and badder.

Another view is the amillennial view. Others call it replacement theology. This view says that the 1000 years spoken of in Revelation 20, six times is not a literal 1000 years. It says that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God and so all God's promises to Israel that were unfulfilled will now be fulfilled in the Church. As soon as Jesus returns, the end of this world has come. The unrighteous are judged and cast into hell and the righteous inherit eternal life, and so to be ever present with the Lord. This is the view of the Roman Catholic Church; many Mennonites and many Evangelicals. I might add, this is an ever growing view in our day.

Yet another view says that the 1000 years spoken of in Revelation 20:1-6 are literal. It gives a time-line like this (demonstrate).

Now in my estimation, amillennialism tends to liberalism and I think it is mainly, if not only

liberals who promote the social gospel. (Let me add here for those who go to Missions Fest in order that you be discerning when you go, that I have been told that most of their speakers and missions are amillennial in view point.)

So you might say, "Well what about Matthew 25? What does it then teach?" Let me show you first to what time period this text is directed. Let me mention to you that in our doctrinal statement we say we believe in the premillennial return of Christ. I believe that is 100% biblically right. According to the premillennial view, we are nearing the end of the Church age. Right after the Church age begins a seven year period of tribulation, tribulation such as this world has never before known. This is briefly described in Matthew 24:9-28. When this time is over, the Lord returns to earth (24:29). Then He sets up His throne of judgment and gathers all the gentiles before Him to judge them (25:31-32).

Now these Gentiles are those who remain alive after the tribulation. I think it may be that all of the unsaved Jews have been killed in the tribulation, and possibly most of the Gentiles as well. Matthew 24 says that if those days would not be shortened, no flesh would remain alive (24:22).

These Gentiles are then divided into two camps called sheep and goats (25:32). I think that one of the subtle dangers of the social Gospels is that without realizing, it builds on a works salvation. The understanding is that if we feed the hungry, clothe the poor, visit prisoners, and bring justice and peace to the hurting people of the world, then we will be saved. How do we get that notion? We get it from verses 34-36 (read). The conclusion we can easily arrive at from those verses is if we do these things, we will be saved. In other words we are saved by doing these things, and that is a works salvation, and according to Paul, cursed is everyone who preaches such a gospel.

Now notice very carefully and mark it well, that the sheep and goats are not divided on the basis of what they have done, but on the basis of what they are; either sheep or goats; saved or unsaved. Only when

they have been separated into the groups of saved and unsaved, are they judged on the basis of what they did. The righteous in 25:34-40 and the unrighteous in 25:41-46.

Now we must carefully identify three groups of people in this account. The first is those referred to as sheep. We notice in verse 33 that the sheep are set on the Lord's right hand. In verse 34 the Lord begins to speak to those on the right hand. In verse 37 they are now identified as the righteous. In verse 34 we are told that these are to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This is the millennial kingdom.

In verse 41 the Lord addresses those on His left hand (read 41). In this verse they are identified as the cursed, or the lost. And they inherit hell fire.

Now we have one more group to identify. In verses 35-36 the Lord says, "I was hungry, thirsty etc... and you ministered to Me." In verse 37-39 the righteous say, (read). Now in verse 40 we find this interesting information. The Lord says, (read 40). So here is the third group. They are identified as the least of these my brethren. And who are these?

Vine's dictionary identifies 11 classes of people called brothers or brethren in the NT. Now when you apply these words, 'these my brethren' to those 11 classes, I think only one option remains, and that is that it refers to His brethren, the Jews.

Could it refer to those called the sheep? No. Then it would say, "...inasmuch as you did it to each other." Could it refer to the goats? Would He call these that he calls the cursed in verse 41 'these, my brethren?' It seems most improbable, if not impossible. What other class would there be present that He might refer to?

One other group of people that will certainly be there as we learn from other Scriptures is saved Jews who have come through the tribulation. And who is being judged here? Matthew 25:32 says it is the nations. The Greek is *ethnos* from which we get the word *ethnic*. This word is generally translated

Gentiles. So it is the Gentiles who are being judged here.

So who are the people called 'these my brethren'? Well, it is the saved Jews who have come through the tribulation. In Acts 3:22 the Apostle Peter says, "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up a Prophet like me from your brethren..." There the Jews were called *brethren*. In Romans 9:3 Paul says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." And who are 'these my brethren' in Matthew 25? They are Christ's brethren according to the flesh, the Jews.

I had just completed my research on this when I went home for lunch. There on the table was a newsletter from "Friends of Israel." The title was, "The Least of These My Brethren." Of course that caught my attention. Listen to a paragraph, "Distinct from the nations or goy and belonging to neither the sheep nor goats, the brethren can refer to only one other group of people - the Jewish people." This article then says this, "At this judgment, compassionate treatment of Messiah's brethren is not the basis of salvation, but gives evidence of genuine faith."

So, let us consider for a moment the phrase, 'these my brethren.' Now notice the demonstrative pronoun 'these'. There are two kinds of demonstrative pronouns that might have been used. It could be *these* or *those*. The pronoun 'these' speaks of those that are nearer. The pronoun 'those' speaks of the remoter persons. So He seems to be speaking about a group near to Him and distinct from both the sheep and the goats.

Then notice further what this group is called. Not only are they referred to by the nearer demonstrative pronoun 'these'. They are referred to as 'these MY brethren'. They are the Lord's own brethren. They belong in some sense to Him. And last, we note that they are called 'these my BRETHREN.' I think He is referring to those of Jewish descent. So this is the judgment of the Gentiles, and they are judged by how they have treated the Jews in the tribulation time.

And so, to use Matthew 25 as a theme verse for the social Gospel is a misuse of Scripture at the price of neglecting the souls of the lost.

C. The Aim of the Social Gospel

What is the goal then, of the social gospel? It is to feed and clothe the poor, and bring about universal peace and justice in our time here on earth. It is not wrong to help the needy, but the great commission given to the Church is to evangelize the world. And what does the effort to bring about a well fed world, and peace and justice in the world do to the Gospel and Christianity? Well, it robs millions of dollars from the actual commission given in the Bible to the church and it gives it to efforts not committed to evangelism.

The great commission in the Bible is not to bring about peace and justice! Listen to Mt 10:34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." What is the great commission of the Church? Listen to Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." That and no other is the great commission of the Church.

D. The Outcome of the Social Gospel

What then is the final outcome of the social gospel? I would not say that no people are saved by those who hold to the social gospel. But the credit for that would not be due to the effectiveness of the social Gospel. But by and large, what happens is people who once sat in darkness, have been taught how to farm and maybe have received some justice, and yet for all that they still sit in darkness. And those who die in this darkness go to hell. This gospel commits a crime of the highest degree.

I want to close by reading an account written up in Time Magazine called, "Keeping the Faith Without Preaching It". But before I read it let me first say that I believe there are well meaning Christians in MCC who truly proclaim the Gospel. I am not condemning all they do. And I will readily agree that they are still doing a lot of good. And furthermore, it is not only MCC that is involved in the social gospel, it is widespread in Christendom and you and I need to be alert. Nor am I saying you should not support MCC, but I would encourage you to check out where your support is going and what it is doing. And if you want your money to be used for the gospel, then seek to make sure that it will be used for that.

(read Time article here)

CONCL: My message this morning is a warning. What happens when Matthew 25:34-36 becomes our theme verse for outreach? We want to fall into a works salvation and we rob missions of its rightful place of priority!

Maybe a little story from one of our own that is told by J.B. Toews of the Mennonite Brethren might be helpful here. This story is written by LEM in his little book, "World Missions Total War". This story might remind us of the crime of spending on achieving justice and peace what should go to missions.

"Pete was well aware of the intense suffering of his other brothers and sisters back in the Ukraine. He had managed to get over to America and to settle in Minnesota. There his business flourished, and he regularly corresponded with George back in Russia, and regularly sent sufficient funds to keep his brothers and sisters from starving. Yet, in spite of all that he sent, one by one each passed away, until only George was left. At length this surviving brother escaped from Russia and made his way to America. He did not come all the way to Minnesota but settled in Wisconsin.

"There was little correspondence between the two brothers, Pete feeling that there was something unaccountable about the curtain that seemed to have fallen over the departure of his brothers and sisters. It came to pass that George fell ill and Pete went down to Wisconsin to see him. He found him sick in the hospital. After some little

conversation Pete finally inquired: "George, what was the matter? Didn't I send enough to keep them alive?" George offered some possible explanations until at length he came out with it: "Oh Pete, you sent enough, but I kept it for myself."

"George had been guilty of the crime of coveteousness - murder by confiscation. And George himself shortly died in the hospital, killed by his conscience. His 'sin had found him out'. 'Twas the cost of disobedience."

The moral of the story for our message this morning? The social gospel is often guilty of withholding the message of eternal life from the needy in far lands by spending it on temporal tummies and peace and justice.